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Chairman: Mr. Macedo ..... (Mexico)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 86: Questions relating to information (A/53/21/Rev.1 and A/53/509)

1. **Mr. Skrypko** (Belarus), Rapporteur, introducing the report of the Committee on Information on the work of its twentieth session, said that, following the format of previous years, the report was divided into four chapters, and it contained as annexes the statements by the Chairman of the Committee on Information and the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information at the opening of the twentieth session. He briefly reviewed the content of the main parts of the report and said that during its discussions the Committee had welcomed the important commemoration of World Press Freedom Day and had expressed its dedication to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, which were fundamental to democracy and development.

2. Many Committee members had noted the dramatic technological achievements in the field of information and communication in recent years and had referred to the still existing disparities between the developed countries and the developing countries, calling for the elimination of those disparities. The Committee had generally supported the proposals of the Secretary-General to initiate reorientation of the Department of Public Information (DPI), stressing that the Committee should be fully involved in the reform activities and that the views of Member States should be taken into account.

3. The Committee had praised the important work of the United Nations information centres, emphasized their invaluable role in the Organization's global outreach and expressed concern about cutbacks in the resources allocated to them. Regarding the integration of the centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme, the Committee had reaffirmed its view that such integration should be carried out on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the views of the host country.

4. Referring to the potential of new technologies to expand the dissemination capabilities of the United Nations, the Committee had praised DPI for effectively entering cyberspace, especially through the Internet, and for enriching the United Nations home page on the World Wide Web. The important work of the Secretariat in providing all Permanent Missions with access to the Organization's electronic data base had been highly appreciated. The Committee had expressed support for the development of electronic communications, but it had emphasized that DPI should maintain its outreach through the traditional media in order to take the particular needs of the people of the developing countries into account.

5. With respect to the preparation and adoption of the Committee's report to the General Assembly, there had been a change in the working method used. Previously, negotiations on the report had been held in the Bureau of the Committee, together with the representatives of the regional groups and the Group of 77 and China. At the twentieth session, in contrast, all members of the Committee had been invited to participate in consultations through an open-ended working group headed by the Chairman, and that procedure would be officially instituted the following year at the twenty-first session of the Committee.

6. At the conclusion of consultations, the Committee had prepared two draft resolutions and a draft decision, which were contained in part IV of the report, and had decided, by consensus, to recommend their adoption to the General Assembly. Draft resolution A, "Information in the service of humanity", was similar to the corresponding resolution adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. Draft resolution B, "United Nations public information policies and activities", reflected ideas that had been put forward in the Committee's debate and spelled out agreed recommendations, which should guide the Department of Public Information in its future work. The draft decision called for an increase in the membership of the Committee from 90 to 93 members and recommended the appointment of Angola, the Republic of Moldova and the Solomon Islands as the new members.

7. Lastly, the Committee had considered the recent report of the Secretary-General on the development of United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity (A/AC.198/1998/4) and had felt that more information was needed in order to evaluate the technical feasibility and programming capacity of a United Nations direct broadcasting system and listeners' interest in such a system. The Secretary-General would provide that information to the Committee at its twenty-first session in 1999.

8. **Mr. Hogen** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the Secretary-General, in the context of the important reform actions he had initiated, had called for the reorientation of communication and public information activities and had stressed the need to foster a communications culture throughout the Organization. The report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities recommended that the information and communications function should be placed at the heart of

strategic management. A communications culture must help people everywhere to realize the relevance of the work of the United Nations to their everyday concerns. The Organization should appear as a transparent institution that responded to major challenges of global significance in all fields, and its messages should find a receptive ear in all parts of the world. Accordingly, it was essential to harness the latest information technology, within the limits of the resources available. In fact, the new technologies should result in dramatic improvements in productivity and continuous improvement in programme delivery. It was important to note that the advances in information technology which were a major focus of the Department's new orientation were not confined to the Internet (the so-called fourth medium of communication) but were also enhancing the effectiveness of the three traditional media: print, radio and television.

9. Development of the use of the Internet had continued during the year; there had already been 77 million accesses to the United Nations Web site from 130 countries. At the end of the current meeting, the Arabic and Chinese home pages would be inaugurated, thus making the service available in all the official languages. The use of the audio and video capacity of the Internet had been initiated in order to facilitate access to United Nations radio and television broadcasts through its Web site. A feasibility study was being conducted on the establishment of a United Nations direct radio broadcasting service. A direct broadcasting pilot project had been developed; its results would be discussed at the twenty-first session of the Committee on Information.

10. In addition to using the Internet capacity, the Department had attempted to establish links with news broadcasting agencies. It had collaborated with Deutsche Welle, the BBC World Service and Insight News Television in providing coverage of visits to various United Nations humanitarian and peacekeeping missions. At the same time, cooperation with other partners in the United Nations system, such as UNICEF, UNDP, ILO and UNHCR, continued to be strengthened. Technical advances were also having an impact on the print media; many of the materials currently produced were adapted and posted on the Internet in order to reach a much larger audience. Nonetheless, the demand for print products remained high, particularly in many developing countries. Moreover, computer design technologies had enabled the Department to prepare materials that appeared virtually simultaneously in print and on the Internet.

11. As part of the strategic reorientation, a number of structural changes had been initiated within the Department of Public Information. A Strategic Communications Planning Group had been established. Composed of Division Directors and Chiefs of Service, it met weekly to review all aspects of the Department's activities and policies. The continuous exchange of ideas at the strategic and tactical levels was essential to effective communications policies. In that context, the Secretary-General had appointed a Director of Communications in his own Executive Office, thereby expanding and deepening the exchange between the Office of the Secretary-General and the Department. Moreover, a Media Response Group, responsible for reviewing media reports on the United Nations and providing advice on the most appropriate response, had been established. An outcome of that initiative was the set of fact sheets entitled "Setting the record straight".

12. The Secretary-General had stressed the programmatic nature of the work of the Department of Public Information, as illustrated by the support it provided to the thematic programmes of other Departments. In the area of peace and security, the Organization's most important communications objective was to be able to transmit accurate and timely information about the role of the United Nations in the complex post-cold-war world situation to multiple and diverse audiences. The Organization must make the best possible use of the available resources and distribution networks in order to provide the media and opinion leaders with the necessary material for broad coverage of United Nations efforts to bolster international peace and security. Continuing close cooperation among Departments had been established in order to transmit consistent and balanced messages relating to international peace and security, including disarmament issues.

13. With regard to peacekeeping, communications played a dual role: public information could contribute to both the operational effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping activities and the understanding and appreciation of the Organization's role by a broader international audience. Acceptance by the international community and the mission-area audience was essential to peacekeeping efforts. However, despite its importance in that field, public information was still not adequately resourced and was not integrated in the overall concept of mission operations. Member States must provide full support to the Department in order to remedy that situation.

14. Turning to development and human rights, he said that in 1998 emphasis was being placed on the preparations for the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the observance of Human Rights Day; the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem; the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International

Criminal Court; the World Youth Forum and the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth; and the observance of the International Year of Older Persons, organized by the Department of Public Information in cooperation with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs under the auspices of the NGO Committee on Ageing.

15. The priority accorded to development issues had led to increased media coverage of United Nations activities relating to economic and poverty issues. The Department had contributed significantly to ensuring global coverage of the special high-level meetings of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly and of the panel discussions on economic development. The increased recognition of the right to development dovetailed with the United Nations human rights programme. In addition, the mainstreaming of issues relating to gender equality and the advancement of women remained a part of the Department's multi-media strategy.

16. The United Nations continued to follow up the major international conferences of the 1990s through five-year reviews and, at the same time, seek new means of ensuring the widespread dissemination of information to the media, non-governmental organizations, universities and the general public. The Department was currently preparing communications strategies and other activities with a view to the five-year reviews of various conferences.

17. One of the most significant aspects of the Department's new orientation was the need for partnerships with various sectors of civil society in order to transmit the message of the United Nations, including the need to strengthen working relations with media representatives, particularly the resident correspondents in the United Nations. He stressed the importance of the Department's coverage of the meetings of the Organization's intergovernmental bodies. The Department would make every effort to maintain its high level of efficiency in the performance of that service.

18. For over half a century, DPI, through its partnership with non-governmental organizations, had been reaching local communities worldwide. By December 1997, 1,547 non-governmental organizations had associate status with the Department. The increase in the number of associated non-governmental organizations showed the ever-increasing interest of such organizations in promoting the work of the Organization. Every week, 200 or so representatives of non-governmental organizations attended the briefings run by the Department. The fifty-first annual DPI/NGO Conference, which had been dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, had taken place at Headquarters from 14 to 16 September 1998; 1,900 representatives of 625 organizations from 60 countries had attended, a record figure. There had been 60 speakers from the United Nations system and various Governments, non-governmental organizations, media and academia.

19. Over the past year, the Department had devoted increased attention to its educational outreach activities by holding workshops for teachers, students' days, a students' conference on human rights for the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and teleconferences with over 5,000 schools in the United States of America, Canada and Mexico, in addition to its ongoing guided tours and group programmes. In response to the ever-increasing interest in the work of the United Nations, the Department was preparing a series of more user-friendly publications with information aimed at schools and the public at large. Evidence of the increasing public interest was to be found in the huge numbers of visitors who had taken the guided tour during the spring of 1998. The exhibits and gifts which visitors saw on the tour were in need of repair or out of date and security restrictions caused problems; however, with the generous support of the Better World Fund, the Department was trying to make visits into an educational, pleasant and financially self-sustaining activity.

20. Technological progress had also had major repercussions on the services provided by the Department's Dag Hammarskjöld Library. In response to calls from Member States, a programme to digitalize documents in the microfiche collection had been initiated. Also, the Department was continuing to make every effort to ensure that its publications were timely and relevant to the current needs of its target audiences. To that end it had revised and updated a number of its publications and had compiled special issues on reform, some of which were specifically aimed at the press. Elimination of the backlog of the *Yearbook of the United Nations*, which was expected in 1999, would facilitate the production of a CD-ROM containing 50 *Yearbooks*, from 1946 to 1996. Application of modern publishing technology would speed production of future editions. The *United Nations Chronicle*, the Organization's flagship publication, had extended its use of human-interest stories and in-depth articles on specific issues, many written expressly for the magazine by outside dignitaries, leading experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations. At the same time, it remained committed to broad coverage of the regular activities of the entire United Nations system. The quarterly *Africa Recovery* had continued to focus on raising global awareness of

Africa's critical economic situation and of the profound transformation Africa had undergone. It had given coverage to the new, democratic regimes, international efforts to promote economic recovery and development, the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871–S/1998/318), and the main social and economic problems. An extensive report would soon be published on the Second Tokyo International Conference on African Development, which had been held in October 1998.

21. Modernization of graphic design technology would enable the Department to provide more creative, higher-quality design services for Secretariat projects faster and more cost-effectively. The Department's sales and marketing operations had generated an excess of income over expenditure of $1,770,000 for the 1996–1997 biennium and had therefore been the most lucrative of the revenue-producing activities in income section 3.

22. An important objective of the reorientation of public information activities was to strengthen the Organization's capacity to communicate at the country level. In that connection, the United Nations information centres were indispensable tools given that not only did they deliver the United Nations message, they adapted it to the local context; thus, they were not only disseminators of information, they were true communicators. During the past year, the centres' activities had emphasized educational and youth outreach, in cooperation with governmental institutions and the ever-expanding community of non-governmental organizations. In several locations, the business community too had offered its cooperation. As a result of technological progress in communications, most information centres were now electronically connected to Headquarters and to each other, and had instant access to United Nations documents and other reference sources. The number of centres that had developed their own Web sites in local languages continued to increase.

23. In that spirit of global teamwork, a meeting had been held at Headquarters in September 1998 of information centre directors and other information staff from 23 locations around the world. Participants had had an opportunity to hear directly from the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General on their vision of the United Nations and to discuss strategic thinking with other Secretariat officials. The directors had also had the rare opportunity to brief members of the Committee on Information personally on the wide-ranging information work which they were performing on behalf of the United Nations. The directors had given the impression that the centres were running at maximum capacity, with a small number of staff performing multiple tasks and taking full advantage of their local contacts and the new communications technologies and equipment. There had been a consensus amongst the directors that new information technologies were important in increasing the efficiency of their operations. However, they had stressed that the strength of the information centres continued to be their ability to customize information activities according to local public opinion and priority issues and to put a "human face" on the work of the Organization. The directors had also been unanimous in stressing the importance of building a constructive partnership between all members of the United Nations family working in the field and of safeguarding the functional autonomy of the integrated information centres.

24. In both theory and practice, the Department of Public Information stressed reorientation of its substantive activities towards greater sensitivity to the needs of the media, other partners in civil society and Governments. The process had to be gradual, but also deliberate and determined. The goal was a United Nations system permeated with a culture of communications and information.

25. **Ms. Sibal** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) noted that UNESCO was the lead agency in matters dealing with the free flow of information by word and image and the development of the communication capacities of Member States. At the dawn of the new millennium, the mandate of UNESCO in that area had been expanded beyond the traditional media to include informatics. UNESCO promoted the dissemination of information, particularly on the activities of the United Nations system, and worked in close partnership with the Department of Public Information. It was also concerned with strengthening cooperation with and among Member States in the communication field. She noted with satisfaction paragraph 38 of draft resolution B contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/53/21/Rev.1), which acknowledged the important work carried out by UNESCO, and reaffirmed that UNESCO would continue to make every effort to fulfil its mandate.

26. UNESCO currently managed more than 300 communication projects, representing a budget of over $40 million, financed mainly from contributions by donor countries, the agencies and funds of the United Nations system or the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), created in 1980 to identify the needs of developing countries in that field, assist them in developing technical and human resources and promote the transfer of technology. Recently, the IPDC Bureau had reviewed another 80 proposals and approved new projects representing $2.5 million for presentation to the Council.

Since its establishment, IPDC had distributed US$ 77 million to some 700 projects in more than 100 countries.

27. One of the main criteria established by IPDC for evaluating proposals was the support which projects gave to independent and pluralistic media; that had led to the strengthening of funds for communications projects. In fact, new projects on the media and communication for good government and human rights, representing more than $7 million were being approved. UNESCO believed that communication, particularly, independent, pluralistic and free media, contributed to democracy and development. Its communication strategy was aimed at encouraging a free flow of information at the international and national levels; promoting a wider and more balanced dissemination of information, without any obstacle to freedom of expression; and strengthening the capacities of the developing countries in order to increase their participation in the communication process. Those aspects formed the social and political basis of human development and of grass-roots participation in the development process.

28. With regard to teamwork with the United Nations system, UNESCO would participate in the television forum to be held the following week and in the follow-up activities thereto. It had also participated in the new communications group and the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) and had served as moderator of a panel on human rights education held within the framework of the annual conference of non-governmental organizations and the Department of Public Information.

29. UNESCO played a vital role in the round tables of the specialized agencies on communication for development, which constituted an informal mechanism for consultation, the sharing of ideas and experience and the organization of joint action. The specialized agencies should seek innovative ways of communicating ideas that reinforced democratic processes and spurred development initiatives; utilizing communication networks, particularly radio and electronic networks, to increase public access to information and facilitate free and fair participation in decision-making processes; and enhancing participation by people at the grass roots level, who were the hardest hit by poverty. UNESCO would continue its active participation in the round tables and would attempt to increase its operational work in field projects aimed at promoting social and economic well-being, strengthening democracy and good government, combating AIDS and other epidemics and improving and facilitating humanitarian services.

30. UNESCO welcomed the ongoing discussions on the feasibility of establishing a United Nations radio network and it looked forward to being able to participate in programming and to working with Member States to promote cultural diversity, including linguistic diversity, through communication through the development of endogenous media capacities, particularly radio broadcasting at the community, national and regional levels.

31. Steps must be taken to ensure respect for multilingualism in the information society so that each individual might benefit to the fullest from the opportunities offered by new technology. The Info-Ethics'98 Congress, recently held in Monaco had been an occasion to discuss the ethical, legal and societal challenges of cyberspace, which were of particular interest to UNESCO. The Congress had provided a unique opportunity for UNESCO to express its views on linguistic diversity and to make strong statements on the need to provide the information society with a transnational political and ethical structure and for Member States to unite their efforts for the benefit of humankind. UNESCO had proposed the following objectives: (a) promoting and defending freedom of expression and the protection of privacy in cyberspace as well as in the traditional media; (b) promoting and extending the public domain of information (free access to governmental information and to the national cultural heritages of the entire world); (c) promoting cultural diversity and multilingualism in cyberspace; and (d) promoting education and training in order to ensure that everyone could use the tools and methods of the media and cyberspace.

32. On 18 and 19 January 1999, UNESCO would convene at its headquarters a meeting of non-governmental organizations, well-known personalities, institutions and experts participating in the fight against paedophilia, child pornography and child prostitution in the media and on the Internet with a view to formulating a common and global plan of action against those crimes and establishing a well-structured network of the groups working in that area. With regard to the response of UNESCO to important General Assembly decisions, its Director-General had submitted to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) an outline of a strategy for communicating to the international media initiatives relating to the International Year and International Decade for the Culture of Peace. Without the participation of Member States that strategy would be meaningless.

33. **Mr. Wibisono** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that technological advances in the field of information and communications were linking nations, together as never before, and that would have tremendous potential for resolving some of the most critical problems facing humankind. Furthermore, the post-cold-war

era offered unprecedented opportunities for strengthening multilateral cooperation in that crucial field. Nonetheless, persistent disparities between developed and developing countries undermined the capacity of the developing countries to make full use of information and communications technologies. In that context, the mandate of the Committee on Information, set out in General Assembly resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, remained as relevant now as it had been the day it was adopted. In that connection, the need to ensure impartiality and balance in the information flow and to strengthen the information and communication infrastructure and the capacity of the developing countries in that field through the transfer of advanced information technology and the expansion of their access to information was more imperative than ever before.

34. The Group of 77 and China stressed the importance of South-South cooperation in the field of information and communication, based on the principle of collective self-reliance. Such cooperation could be enhanced through the sharing of development experiences, the transfer of technology and the harnessing of latent synergies and complementarities between the developing countries. Likewise, North-South cooperation needed to be developed on the basis of genuine partnership in order for the developing countries to overcome technical, financial and other difficulties and to become equal partners in the age of information and communication.

35. The Group of 77 and China commended the work of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) of UNESCO, an important instrument for the implementation of the UNESCO strategy for communication in the service of humanity, based on international cooperation, and for the global development of communication and information in general, of the corresponding infrastructure and of the capacity of the developing countries in that field.

36. On the current international scene, overwhelmed by an information revolution, the media must disseminate objective and impartial information, taking into account the unique social and cultural traditions of each region and acting with a sense of professionalism, ethics and responsibility. In a changing world order, the successful fulfilment of the DPI mandate was crucial, including the mobilization of global opinion in support of the goals and objectives of the United Nations and coverage of the critical questions before the Organization. With regard to paragraph 30 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/509), it was of particular importance to the developing countries that the United Nations should redouble its efforts to enhance the traditional media; in that context, it was necessary to accord equal respect to all the official languages of the United Nations.

37. Referring to paragraph 8 of the report, concerning the Internet, he stressed that the United Nations home page and all its sites on the Internet were, in essence, a publication. They should therefore be regarded on the same basis as other publications and should contain comprehensive, objective and balanced information on all issues before the Organization. It was also necessary to ensure editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly.

38. The Group of 77 and China took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the development of United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity (A/AC.198/1998/4) and trusted that account would be taken of the views expressed during the deliberations of the Committee on Information, including the importance attached to those initiatives and that of maintaining existing radio programmes, respecting the linguistic diversity of the membership of the Organization and providing the widest possible geographical coverage.

39. As for the United Nations information centres, the Group of 77 and China noted with concern the problems posed by some instances of integration in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and believed that a reappraisal was necessary in order to remedy those situations. It was essential to preserve the independence, maintain the effectiveness and strengthen the work of the information centres. It should be recalled that the General Assembly had stressed in various resolutions that the process of integration should be implemented on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country. At the same time, the views of Member States should be considered in elaborating proposals for the restructuring of the centres and the establishment of regional hubs. It was essential to continue allocating the necessary resources to the centres in order to ensure their effective functioning, particularly in the developing countries. In that connection, the Group of 77 and China looked forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the review of earlier cases of integration of the centres, called for in paragraph 87 of General Assembly resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997, which would be considered at the twenty-first session of the Committee on Information.

40. **Mr. Rahman** (Bangladesh) said that public information played a crucial role in the work of the Organization, particularly in the context of the ongoing reform process at the United Nations, and that his delegation fully supported the statement made by the representative of

Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. With regard to the reform of the United Nations, he referred to the restructuring of the Department of Public Information and the redefining of its objectives with a view to making the global audience fully aware of the work of the Organization. His delegation had supported the Secretary-General's initiative in that regard, on the understanding that public information activities would form part of the substantive programmes of the Organization, and that, as a cross-cutting issue, they would be integrated in all United Nations activities. It was to be hoped that, as a result of the initiative, information on the objectives and activities of the Organization relating to such vital issues as peace, development and justice would be widely disseminated.

41. In order to achieve the objective of establishing a just and effective global information system, the Department of Public Information should not only promote the regular activities of the United Nations but also act as the forerunner of an information system in which all Member States would have the same opportunities to participate. In that context, the Department should focus its attention on publicizing the activities of the Organization in areas that were related to and affected the lives of common people; in other words, it should accord priority to issues relating to social, economic and human development. Furthermore, press releases issued by the Department must reflect objectively the deliberations in the various forums of the United Nations, particularly on development-related issues. In that connection, he expressed disappointment at the recent instances of insufficient coverage of issues of importance to the developing countries and requested the competent Department unit to show greater sensitivity in that regard.

42. His delegation praised the work of the section responsible for the United Nations site on the World Wide Web and supported the expansion and upgrading of the Optical Disk System and the idea of charging a fee to outside users.

43. His delegation was pleased to contribute constructively, in both the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) and the Fifth Committee, to the process of establishing a new description of the functions of the Department of Information under the medium-term plan and hoped that that description, which would establish broad parameters for the activities of the Department in the coming years, would be approved shortly.

44. The United Nations information centres were the real interface of the Organization with the global community. Their independence and effectiveness should therefore be maintained and, where necessary, strengthened. Unfortunately, the opposite trend had been observed in recent years. A number of centres, including the one in Bangladesh, had been integrated in the UNDP office in the name of efficiency and integrated management objectives which, in most cases, had not been achieved. That process had not only reduced the efficiency of the Dhaka Centre, and many others in the developing countries, but also effectively isolated the Centre from its targeted audience and prevented it from fulfilling its intended purpose. His delegation had repeatedly brought that issue to the attention of the competent authorities and had requested the Secretary-General to review the process of integration with a view to making an objective assessment of the need for each centre and its capacity to deliver mandated programmes and activities. In that connection, he wished to mention paragraph 87 of General Assembly resolution 52/220, which requested the Secretary-General to carry out such review and formulate relevant recommendations, taking into account the views of the host country. His delegation hoped that, during the current session, a specific time-frame for the review would be set.

45. With regard to the recommendation concerning regional information hubs, his delegation was pleased to offer its services in the establishment of a regional hub in Dhaka and would be participating in the deliberations leading to the adoption of a decision in that regard.

46. **Ms. Boyko** (Ukraine) said that she agreed with the conceptual framework proposed in the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/53/509) and welcomed the measures taken to reform the Department of Public Information. In that regard, she commended the Department's work in providing sources of electronic information, such as the United Nations Website, and hoped that the new media segment would facilitate the dissemination of information. She also welcomed and supported the efforts of the Ad hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics to upgrade the information capacity of the United Nations together with the capacity of Member States, whose missions participated actively in the Organization's information activities.

47. Unfortunately, technology brought not only benefits but also difficulties, such as the year 2000 problem. Her Government was deeply concerned about that problem and had begun to take measures to avoid its consequences, not only in its own territory, but also within the framework of information links with the world economic system. The Government had established a national agency on informatics which coordinated Government measures to resolve the year 2000 problem; in that regard, priority was being given to the most important branches of the economy.

48. She agreed that the United Nations needed to enhance its radio broadcasting capacity and suggested that pilot radio broadcasts for selected regions in Africa and Europe could yield promising results. The results of such broadcasts would demonstrate the technical feasibility and programming capacity of the United Nations and would determine the interest of listeners in United Nations broadcasting programmes. Moreover, radio broadcasting programmes should be included in the prior planning process for United Nations peacekeeping operations.

49. Her delegation welcomed the fact that the Department of Public Information continued to strengthen its links with non-governmental organizations. It welcomed the Department's efforts to coordinate a number of events and programmes, such as World Press Freedom Day, organized by the Department in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Correspondents Association (UNCA) and the World Press Freedom Committee. The United Nations was obviously doing its utmost to reorient its public information activities in order to mobilize public support and create a new, positive image of the Organization.

50. She regretted that, even as the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was being celebrated, journalists continued to be attacked in violation of article 19 of the Declaration, which proclaimed the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. That was why her delegation continued to attach great importance to the adoption of the necessary measures to protect journalists, especially those covering situations in areas of conflict and in regions affected by social and military tension. As its contribution to press freedom in the world, her delegation had submitted to the Committee on Information a draft resolution on the protection of journalists discharging their professional duties in areas of armed conflict. It hoped that the item would be included in the agenda of the next session of the Committee on Information, to be held in May 1999.

51. **Mr. Stagg** (Panama) said that, after many years of deadlock, the agreement reached by the members of the Committee on Information on the establishment of a working group would permit the adoption of more transparent negotiation mechanisms in order to begin the consideration of substantive aspects of that body's mandate.

52. While the Rio Group commended the establishment of a direct United Nations broadcasting service, it believed that the operation of such a service should not result in reduced resources for the current United Nations Radio service. The Rio Group countries benefited from the United Nations Radio through short programmes in Spanish and Portuguese that met the requirement of informing the public about what was happening in the United Nations. Such activities should continue and any new initiative should take into account the linguistic diversity of the United Nations and have programmes covering all countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The countries of the Rio Group were prepared to contribute their views on any initiatives concerning the dissemination of their activities.

53. The Rio Group gave priority to the functional independence and operational capacity of the United Nations information centres in its member countries, wished to reiterate its position with respect to the integration of such centres with other bodies of the United Nations system and hoped that full use would be made of their potential.

54. **Mr. Al-Romaithi** (United Arab Emirates) said that the Department played an important role in the promotion of understanding among peoples and the development of economic and human resources. While modern communications media had helped to disseminate topics of world interest, they had caused the poorest countries that did not have modern technology to be marginalized from the development process. Therefore, international efforts to bridge the gap between developing and developed countries should be intensified through the implementation of an information strategy on aspects of globalization relating to social justice and the understanding among peoples that strengthened assistance to developing countries, vulnerable population groups and the victims of armed conflicts, human rights violations and natural disasters.

55. His delegation, convinced of the need to establish a broader and balanced world information system that restricted the hegemony of developed countries, rejected the attempts to discriminate against certain Islamic States and third world countries and the media campaigns against them. For that reason, a code of conduct in the field of information should be instituted in order to ensure respect for cultural diversity and guarantee the transparency and objectivity of information.

56. Given the fact that information also had to broaden culture and human knowledge in addition to promoting economic and cultural development, his Government had begun to update the country's laws on information technology and communications and had carried out a number of local surveys. Freedom of the press was respected in his country, which encouraged innovative intellectual thinking.

57. He supported all proposals aimed at the reorientation and strengthening of the activities of the Department and United Nations Information centres. He also supported the activities being carried out in coordination and cooperation with other bodies to highlight the economic problems of developing countries and to promote the understanding of the goals of disarmament, peace, development, humanitarian affairs and the environment. Sufficient resources should be made available to provide more information on, and heighten the world's awareness of, the question of Palestine and other questions relating to international peace and security.

58. He welcomed the recommendations of the Committee on Information at its recent session to reduce the differences between developing and developed countries and to promote peace and security, the development of natural and human resources, and sustainable development. In that regard, he urged all countries to increase cooperation in the dissemination of information in order to promote understanding and harmony among all peoples of the world.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.

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Chairman: Mr. Macedo ..... (Mexico)

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Agenda item 86: Questions relating to information (*continued*)

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98-82391 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 86: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/53/21 and 509)

1. **Mr. Çarikçi** (Turkey) said that in the modern interdependent world it was more important than ever before to maintain and develop cooperation, mutual understanding and respect between all Member States, all of which required a free flow and exchange of accurate, complete and objective information. In that connection, the Turkish Government attached particular importance to the work done within the United Nations system regarding information and communications, especially the activities carried out by the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

2. Turkey had accumulated much experience in that field, and the level of development of communications in Turkey had enabled it to keep pace. At the same time, Turkey understood the aspirations and preoccupations of the developing countries in the information and communications field and appreciated the developing countries' need for assistance in building up the necessary communications and information infrastructure, for which free and more widespread dissemination of information were required.

3. Turkey attached great importance to the activities and effective functioning of the United Nations information centres, intensification of the links in the field between the Department of Public Information and the developing countries, training of journalists and broadcasters from the developing countries and the adoption of modern, more efficient technology for the preparation and dissemination of information materials. The report of the Secretary-General entitled "Questions relating to information" (A/53/509) showed that the significant progress that had been made in all those areas of the Department's work was the result of placing the communications function at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations. In that connection, a number of general comments were called for. First, concerning the relationship between quality and quantity in the services provided by the Department and the resources allotted to its activities in the prevailing critical financial situation, it was evident that given the increased demand for public information the Department could not be expected to continue undertaking further responsibilities without additional resources. His delegation therefore believed that, with due respect for the principle of financing within existing resources, a solid financial basis commensurate with the Department's needs must be established and made available to it. Secondly, the priorities of United Nations information activities must be defined in the light of the issues before the United Nations system as a whole, with special focus on areas such as economic, social and cultural development, poverty eradication, human rights, peacekeeping operations, drug control, the threat of international terrorism and the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Thirdly, the function of the Strategic Communications Planning Group was becoming increasingly important in securing the necessary coordination between the various departments and agencies in the United Nations system, avoiding duplication in the field and carrying out joint projects and activities [approved at Headquarters].

4. **Mr. Zaki** (Egypt) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Egypt attached particular importance to the activities of the Committee on Information, which was responsible for developing appropriate policies in that area. He pointed out the need to adopt fresh approaches and ensure transparency in the Committee's work. He welcomed the results achieved by the Committee at its twentieth session. His delegation had noted with interest the information on establishing a United Nations international broadcasting service and wholeheartedly supported the innovative projects in that area. However, it was concerned about the delays in the work being carried out in that regard.

5. He expressed his delegation's gratitude to the Department for setting up a United Nations home page in Arabic which would allow people in Arab countries who were interested in the Organization's work to obtain the relevant information through that important channel. However, the traditional methods of broadcasting information — radio, television and the press — should not be forgotten. He called on the Secretariat to continue to take steps in that area also. He emphasized the importance of supporting the United Nations information centres in Member States. His delegation had taken part in the recent seminar on that issue and hoped that the Secretariat would take decisive steps to remove the difficulties being encountered by some information centres and in particular the problems arising out of the centres' merging with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) field offices. Further, he pointed to the need to revitalize field activities, especially those relating to the question of Palestine.

6. **Mr. Tekaya** (Tunisia) expressed his delegation's support for the statement by the representative of Indonesia which had set out the position of the Group of 77 and China

on extremely important, information-related issues. As a result of scientific and technological progress in the field of information and communications, significant progress had been made which would help solve many social and economic problems and strengthen the foundations of democracy and liberty in the world's various countries. Within its overall policy framework, Tunisia had put information and communications at the top of its list of priorities. Further steps were being taken to increase the role of information in ensuring freedom of the press and of expression and in expanding the capacity of the appropriate bodies to exercise more effective control over information and communications activities. Also, the Internet was being used more and more actively in Tunisia's schools and offices, and Tunisia was keeping pace with technological progress in that field.

7. Information was playing an extremely important role during the current period of globalization, and it was to be hoped that the United Nations would make use of the opportunities that were opening up in that area to help strengthen peace, bring growth and prosperity to the world's peoples and achieve sustainable development. Unfortunately, the gap between the developed and the developing countries in the communications area was still extremely wide. The least developed countries were still not in any condition to make advantageous use of technological progress in communications to achieve stable development. In that connection, Tunisia called for solidarity to be shown with those countries and for partnerships to be developed with them. The Organization could play a very prominent role in that regard. The United Nations and UNESCO were making a major contribution to developing North-South cooperation and to increasing the capacity of the countries of the South in the information field.

8. With regard to the reorientation of the work of the Department of Public Information, which was envisaged in the reform programme proposed by the Secretary-General, the Department was making significant efforts to stay abreast with scientific and technological progress. It was making increasing use of the Internet, which opened out new possibilities for the dissemination of information. Tunisia hoped that those efforts would continue. He expressed appreciation to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library for the support it provided every day to the Permanent Mission of Tunisia. As to the Internet, he noted with satisfaction that recently the Department had created a home page in Arabic. That was yet another important achievement of the Department in its work during the current year. The Department must be provided with sufficient resources to enable it to expand the CyberSchoolBus project on the Internet, since that project was very popular with the general public. Lastly, with regard to the question of integrating the information centres with UNDP field offices, it should be noted that, in a number of resolutions, the General Assembly had particularly stressed the role which the information centres played in developing countries. Tunisia believed that the consideration of the matter should continue.

9. **Mr. Dausa** (Cuba) said that his delegation fully supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Recently, as a result of technical progress, information and communications had acquired enormous significance, and they should become a useful instrument in the socio-economic development of all the peoples. Nevertheless, that progress, along with positive aspects, had a negative side too: the technological gap between the developed and the developing countries was steadily widening. The solution of that problem, of course, was not to reject the indisputable benefits of progress in those spheres, but to facilitate the advancement of the developing countries to a level of technological development at which they would not only be able to use those means, but also become full-fledged participants in the exchange of information.

10. The international community should make serious and consistent efforts to establish a new world information and communication order, which would make it possible to strengthen the technical potential of the developing countries. The United Nations, and specifically the Department of Public Information, could and should facilitate those efforts, and in that connection he welcomed the practical approach taken by UNESCO.

11. An even more important matter than the elimination of the existing technological gap and facilitation of the access of the developing countries to information on the Internet and the optical disk system was the preservation of the Organization's ability to disseminate information on its work through traditional channels, including the radio. In that connection, his delegation noted the discussion in the Committee on Information of the development of the United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity. While commending the efforts of the Secretariat in that sphere, his delegation noted that existing programmes should not suffer, and that such broadcasts should be directed in the first place towards the developing countries.

12. In view of the important role of the United Nations information centres in disseminating information about the Organization, the centres should have the necessary financial resources to carry out their work. Recalling its position on the question of integrating the information centres with

UNDP offices, his delegation once again declared that, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, a precondition for such integration should be the preservation of the independence of those centres and the effectiveness of their work. The question of integration should be resolved on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the Member States in which those centres were located. At the next meeting of the Committee on Information, the Secretary-General would present a report on the first steps with regard to integrating the information centres, and the consideration of that report would be of great importance.

13. Objective information, taking into account the social and cultural characteristics of various peoples, would undoubtedly help strengthen relations between countries. However, the use of information for political purposes, particularly to undermine sovereignty and interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, should be prohibited by the international community. As indicated in the resolution adopted recently by the First Committee, information technologies and means could be used for purposes that were inconsistent with the objectives of ensuring international stability and security. The resolution embodied the idea, fully supported by his delegation, that the use of information resources or technologies for criminal or terrorist purposes must be prevented.

14. That idea was directly related to Cuba's repeated comments in the Committee on Information and the Fourth Committee about the electronic war which was being waged against it. Every week over 1,953 hours of radio and television broadcasts were transmitted to Cuba from the territory of the United States of America, which spent over US$ 22 million a year on that electronic war against Cuba. Those actions not only undermined Cuba's sovereignty, but also ran counter to the most elementary norms of international law and the rules established by the International Telecommunication Union. Those broadcasts distorted the real situation in Cuba, and directly aided subversive and terrorist actions against Cuba. His delegation once again condemned that aggression and rejected the attempts of the United States of America to determine what kind of information the Cubans should receive; in that connection Cuba would continue to take the necessary steps to counter that electronic war.

15. **Mr. Osei** (Ghana) said that in view of the expanding role of the United Nations in international affairs and the increasing interest of the peoples of the world in its activities, the work of the Department of Public Information was of critical importance. The Department had been established out of the conviction that the Organization would not be able to pursue its objectives successfully unless the people of the world were fully informed of its objectives. The expanding responsibilities of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security, the development of friendly relations among nations and the promotion of international cooperation highlighted the strategic role that the Department should play in building public support for the Organization.

16. In that regard, his delegation noted that the Department was paying increasing attention to the subject of sustainable economic and social development in the work of the Organization. Ghana was convinced that sustainable development held the key to global peace, and therefore appreciated the Department's focus of raising the profile of the African continent in the media. Examples were the prominent coverage in the world press of the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa and the Department's information campaign in connection with President Clinton's recent visit to Africa. The Department had also made an important contribution by publicizing information about Africa at the recent Tokyo Conference on African Development.

17. Ghana noted the Department's role in support of United Nations efforts to maintain international peace and security through the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping, support for field missions, and the preparation of materials for posting on the Internet. Ghana also appreciated the Department's efforts to harness new information technologies, which were growing extremely rapidly, and expected the Department to be at the forefront, particularly through the United Nations information centres in developing countries. It was only when those countries were assisted in acquiring new information technologies that the Department would be able to rely on their local resources for the dissemination of information on the Organization. Ghana noted that traditional means of information, such as the press, radio and television, would remain for a long time the primary media for many countries, and that the use of such means should under no circumstances be reduced. Ghana renewed its call for the establishment of a new world information and communication order. If the developing countries were left too far behind in entering the new information superhighway, that would perpetuate the inequalities which already existed between the North and the South in the field of social and economic development.

18. Ghana attached great importance to the activities of the United Nations information centres in Ghana and

elsewhere. The centres could do their job more effectively if they were given adequate resources. In that connection, he welcomed the strategic steps taken by the centres over the previous year to enhance their dissemination of information about the Organization's work. The provision of technical equipment and staff training to broaden information outreach to local audiences was commendable. Similarly, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was crucial to the work of many delegations, particularly those that did not have the latest technology at their disposal. The expansion of the Library's facilities, such as the creation of an electronic news service about the United Nations, the training programme in electronic information retrieval and the electronic dissemination of the most important information to Governments and staff by electronic mail, was significantly increasing information delivery from the Department of Public Information.

19. **Mr. Vu Tran Phong** (Viet Nam) said that his delegation fully associated itself with the statement by the representative of Indonesia speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. At a time of change and reform and of enormous advances in the field of communications and information, the United Nations had, as never before, clearly demonstrated the link between peace, security and development. In his delegation's view, the maintenance of international peace and security and the promotion of economic and social development were the Organization's two principal tasks. Information had a crucial role to play in that regard and therefore so did the activities of the Department of Public Information. He welcomed the Department's internal reform efforts, including diversification of its media outreach, which should help promote a more balanced and equitable information system.

20. His delegation recognized the importance of revitalizing the work of the United Nations system in the field of information and informatics and also the important role played by the information centres in providing information about the Organization's activities in Member States. Concerning the integration of the information centres with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices, his delegation shared the views of the Group of 77 and China that it should be done on a case-by-case basis and taking the view of the host country into account. Also, the views of the Member States must be taken into account in developing proposals on restructuring the information centres and in the Secretary-General's establishment of regional hubs.

21. His delegation was concerned about the great disparity between the developing and the developed countries in the communication and information field resulting from the developing countries' lack of the necessary infrastructure and technology. The international community and the United Nations should strive to do away with that imbalance, and the primary task in that regard was to render technical assistance to the developing countries for improving their communication systems. The Organization as a whole and the Department of Public Information in particular must play a key role in narrowing the gap by disseminating accurate information about the Organization's work amongst Member States. Only when technical assistance and accurate information were provided, would it be possible to establish a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order that would respect the cultural and social values and the identity and sovereignty of all States.

22. His delegation reaffirmed its commitment to South-South cooperation in the field of information and communication and called on the developed countries to help the developing countries build communication infrastructures to narrow the gap in that regard. Although it was important for the Organization to use the Internet, traditional media remained indispensable. Radio broadcasting remained the most direct and cost-effective medium for reaching audiences throughout the world, especially in the developing countries, and in that connection his delegation had taken note of the Department's plan to launch a pilot international radio broadcasting plan before the end of the current year. Lastly, he stressed that information had an important role to play in promoting peace and international understanding and that the public information efforts of the United Nations should focus on that aim.

23. **Mr. Kouliev** (Azerbaijan) said that his country attached great importance to free access to and free distribution of information. As a newly independent State that had taken the democratic path only recently, Azerbaijan viewed information freedom as a tool for promoting the principles of liberalism and transparency. Consequently, in implementation of that policy, the leadership of Azerbaijan had invited to its recent presidential elections about 300 observers from various international organizations, who had attested to the fact that a free choice had been made by Azerbaijan's people. On the eve of the election campaign, President Aliyev had signed a decree abolishing censorship completely. Currently, about 500 different publishing houses reflecting the whole spectrum of Azerbaijan's political and cultural life were registered and in operation there.

24. Azerbaijan fully supported the ideas and goals set out in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/509). One of the most important provisions of the new strategy was the strengthening of the Organization's ability to communicate

at the country and regional levels to ensure that the global messages of the United Nations both reflected and were tailored to national orientations. Thus, further strengthening the role of the United Nations information centres in the field was one important way to carry out the fundamental tasks set out in the Charter. His delegation noted the positive role played in Azerbaijan by those representing the Department of Public Information, who were doing important work in disseminating information there about the various areas of United Nations activity.

25. He supported the Secretary-General's view as reflected in the report that the print medium remained one of the principal means of influencing public opinion around the world. The work of regional representatives was promoting close cooperation with the United Nations system as a whole. The traditional mass media — press, radio and television — were especially important in the developing countries and countries with economies in transition. He supported the idea expressed in the report of establishing a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity, while stressing the need to broadcast not only in English and French but also in the Organization's other official languages, which would significantly expand the channel's audience.

26. While welcoming the Department's efforts and noting its enormous advances in the electronic information field, his delegation believed it necessary to point out that, because of the manifold economic and financial problems faced by countries with economies in transition, the traditional mass media were still the principal sources of information there. Still, the Department should continue to pay a great deal of attention to assistance to and cooperation with developing countries and countries with economies in transition in the electronic information field as well. The Department's operational activities must also be strengthened, particularly at a time when crises and conflicts were becoming more acute.

27. Azerbaijan welcomed the significant progress made in the electronic information field and the corresponding library services. Internet access to United Nations documents in all official languages had enabled permanent missions and other official State offices to obtain useful information from the United Nations. In that connection, he noted also the importance of the activities of the Working Group on Informatics.

28. **Mr. Takasu** (Japan) said that, since the role which the mass media played in the contemporary world could not be overemphasized, the Department of Public Information, as the centre for all United Nations activities in the field of communication and information, must play a more active role in disseminating information about the Organization's work around the world by gaining the broad public support for it without which the Organization would not be able to function effectively. His delegation supported the goals set out in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/509): to permeate the Organization with the communications culture, develop a more effective communications strategy, disseminate relevant information in an effective, coordinated and timely manner and place the information and communications function at the heart of the Organization's strategy. In that connection, he welcomed the establishment of a Strategic Communications Planning Group, which was discussed in the report of the Secretary-General to the Committee on Information on the implementation of the measures regarding information and communications (A/AC.198/1998/2), and which had already started work, and the appointment to the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information of a Director to head the Information Technology Section. Those measures could strengthen the exchange of ideas at the strategic and tactical levels and help formulate a communications strategy to be adopted by all parts of the United Nations system. The Department of Public Information would necessarily play a leading role in that process. In view of the rapid changes that were constantly taking place in the international arena, the Department must have the flexibility to adjust its emphasis and orientations to emerging situations and must also have the resources to do so. Further, the Department must be able to respond promptly to feedback from its audience so as to ensure that the information which it provided was always both relevant and understandable.

29. As the Secretary-General's report indicated, the advent of the Internet as the "fourth" medium, in addition to the press, radio and television, had opened up unprecedented avenues for communication, and every effort should be made to use it in providing the public with information about United Nations activities. A two-way flow of information would enable people to understand those activities better and gain a better grasp of how those activities were relevant to them. In that connection, his delegation supported the Department's introduction of online chat channels to United Nations experts on various issues. Work must also continue on the United Nations Web site so that the media around the world could make better use of the information posted on it.

30. At the same time, the traditional means of disseminating information, such as radio and television, would continue to be important into the next century. Thus, from 18 to 20 November 1998, the Permanent Mission of

Japan would join in sponsoring the World Television Forum, during which the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) would demonstrate high-definition television to the United Nations. The importance of radio could not be overstated, especially for the developing countries, because of its low cost and wide availability; his delegation therefore looked forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the pilot project to revive direct broadcasts by United Nations Radio.

31. Direct contact between the United Nations and local communities was extremely important. Thus, the United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo was effectively enhancing public awareness in Japan of United Nations activities, which was very important for maintaining support there for them. During the Secretary-General's recent visit to Japan, the Academic Council for the United Nations had been established there to promote support for the Organization. The new organization would supplement the activities of the 43 branches of the United Nations Association of Japan in ensuring public support for the Organization's activities. He expressed the hope that the Department of Public Information would develop its activities in Japan in cooperation with those associations. In that context, the Department must be provided with sufficient resources, and his delegation opposed any arbitrary, percentage reductions in the Department's budget, believing that each activity should be reviewed regularly on the basis of its relevance and effectiveness.

32. **Ms. Ho** (Singapore) said that, as the Secretary-General had stated in his report (A/53/509), technological progress had perhaps had its most profound impact in the communications and information field, with the Internet leading the information revolution. The convergence of telecommunications, computer and broadcasting technologies would have an even greater impact on the way information was transmitted. Faster and more powerful telecommunication networks now enabled data to be sent in milliseconds, whereas television provided access to varied forms of information from almost everywhere. Contemporary satellite systems were making it possible for people to make calls from any part of the world to any other.

33. The Internet, which was often called the "fourth" medium after the press, radio and television, was helping annihilate distance between societies and nations. Although the traditional mass media retained their importance as societies' main information channel, the information technology revolution was changing the way people lived and worked: now, people with access to a computer could not only use all the world's information, they could provide it too. However, as it was a global, transboundary phenomenon, the Internet did pose certain problems of harmful content and influences that conflicted with the traditions and values of particular societies. Countries felt powerless in the face of those problems because the growth of cyberspace was uncontrolled. Instead of resisting change, States should rather adapt to the new ways of doing things to keep some control over the general direction of technological progress.

34. The very survival of Singapore, a small country with an open economy, depended on its ability to adapt to the changes taking place around the world. Singapore was building its own information superhighway to link up with the other information superhighways of the world. The Internet industry was experiencing strong growth: currently, the Internet employed 500,000 people in Singapore, up from 240,000 in 1996, out of a population of 3 million. The number of Web sites had also shot up, from 900 in 1996 to 4,000 in 1998. In its Internet-related activities, Singapore was seeking to make use of the principle of industry self-regulation. The fundamental responsibility for information content going onto the Internet must lie with the leaders of the industry. Both the content-related and the technological aspects of the Internet were regulated on the basis of a set of minimum standards rather than by imposing any censorship limitations. One of the requirements was to bar access to about 100 very specific undesirable sites; the Internet Code of Practice outlined what the community found offensive or harmful to Singapore's racial and religious harmony. Although, so far, no punitive action had been taken against anyone in the industry, the mere possibility of punishment for prohibited activities seemed to have a certain deterrent effect. Singapore was encouraging the industry to regulate itself and take its own initiatives against harmful content and viruses. Singapore supported content classification according to international standard guidelines, and every Internet service provider was required to offer, as an option for parents, a sanitized version of the Internet called the "Family Access Network". The "family" services would prevent access to undesirable information by allowing parents to specify what sites their children could access. However, as the Internet was a transnational phenomenon, it was necessary to impose such regulation at the international level too, which would also help combat other transboundary crimes in cyberspace.

35. **Mr. Skrypko** (Belarus) said that the National Committee to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which had been set up by decree of the President of Belarus, was carrying out a wide range measures to publicize human rights and enhance awareness in that area by involving the country's major mass media. The National Assembly of Belarus had

held extensive parliamentary hearings on human rights problems, and appropriate recommendations had been formulated on the basis of those hearings; in particular, provision had been made for the preparation of a National Plan of Action in the human rights field and for harmonizing the relevant legislation.

36. In that context, the Belarusian delegation supported the Secretary-General's reform proposals on reorienting the Organization's activities in the information area and thoroughly approved of the measures to introduce a culture of communications throughout the Organization's activities, place the information function at the very heart of the Organization's strategic management, strengthen the role of the Department of Public Information and strengthen also the Organization's ability to communicate at the country and regional levels. In his delegation's opinion, the reform of the information sector should be carried out in close cooperation with the States Members of the Organization, in the first instance through the Committee on Information, and taking into account national interests, but without prejudice to the Department's priority programmes which had already been approved.

37. It was important to strengthen activities highlighting the practical difficulties which countries with economies in transition were facing along the road towards integrating themselves into the global economy and implementing their democratic transformations. By focusing on problems specific to the transition period, the Department of Public Information could play an important role in mobilizing international assistance to help those countries achieve sustainable development in the social, economic, environmental and other fields. The Government of Belarus thought highly of the activities being carried out by the information component of the United Nations office in Minsk, with whose cooperation the Centre for United Nations Studies in Belarus had been set up. Given the increasing volume of work resulting from the increase in interest on the part of the people of Belarus in the Organization's activities, his delegation believed that that component's capacity should be enhanced.

38. His delegation believed that it was vitally necessary to continue and redouble the efforts by the Department and other parts of the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Unit, in the area of long-term post-Chernobyl information activities with a view to mobilizing international assistance to eliminate the ever-increasing consequences of the disaster. The task of increasing the world community's awareness of the humanitarian, medical and environmental consequences of that nuclear accident must be made part of the mandate of a reformed Department of Public Information that would be capable of making a substantive contribution to eliminating the "Chernobyl fatigue" that had recently taken shape amongst the donor countries, and was adversely affecting the further financing of the rehabilitation projects that had been developed by the Organization. The creation of a special Chernobyl section on the United Nations home page, with information on the activities being carried out by the Organization and the affected States to minimize the effects of the accident, might be a major step in that direction. Interested countries could assist the Department of Public Information in that matter by providing the relevant information.

39. His delegation had examined with interest the Secretary-General's proposal to establish an international broadcasting service for United Nations Radio and believed that during implementation of the pilot project and, most importantly, in the start-up phase of the direct broadcasting service itself, the principle of the Organization's linguistic diversity must be respected. He particularly emphasized the importance of establishing a direct broadcast capacity in Russian, a language used by an audience of many millions in the many countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Belarus. In determining the target regions for broadcasting live programmes, the assumption should be that the degree of interest in United Nations Radio programmes — like that in information materials that used other forms of mass media such as the press and television — would be highest primarily in countries where there was limited access to the latest communications technologies such as the Internet. That lack of access was a particularly pressing problem for States with economies in transition and the developing countries.

40. **Mr. Zohar** (Israel) stressed that Israel, as a democratic republic, upheld freedom of speech and information and, despite the difficulties its situation posed, did not restrict freedom of the press. Currently, a dozen newspapers in Hebrew and several in other languages, including Arabic and English, appeared regularly, as did over 1,000 periodicals. Private stations competed with State-controlled radio, and Israeli television viewers had unrestricted access to global television channels through cable networks. Free access to the Internet was not just guaranteed, it was encouraged. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had its own Web site with information about the peace process in all its aspects. Israel supported freedom of access to information throughout the world and respected the right and duty of journalists to go about their business. Journalists in Israel played an important role as watchdogs of democracy and protectors of human and consumer rights.

41. **Ms. Durrant** (Jamaica) speaking on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that were also States Members of the United Nations, said that CARICOM associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Over the previous two decades, thanks to technological progress in the information field, the world had become much more close-knit. The information revolution was the key to the future of the developing countries: access to information, in essence, made possible better education, improved health care and increased competitiveness and allowed people to play a more active role in the world's affairs. In that connection, the CARICOM countries fully supported the efforts of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other bodies in the United Nations system to improve access to information and information technology, especially in developing countries. The communications function must be placed at the heart of the Organization's strategic management. Equally important was the emphasis on developing a culture of communications throughout the Organization. In that connection she applauded the efforts of the Department of Public Information, the Working Group on Informatics and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library aimed at making use of the whole vast array of information resources. The flow of information coming to permanent missions through the Internet was making it possible to enhance communications between missions and the Secretariat.

42. A number of aspects of the Secretary-General's report (A/53/509) which related to increasing public awareness of the Organization's activities were of importance to the CARICOM Member States. She therefore noted with satisfaction the public information programme that had been undertaken in connection with the June 1998 special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem. CARICOM looked forward to a similar programme in connection with the special session to review the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The focus on enhancing links between the United Nations, the media and broad sectors of civil society was certainly a step in the right direction. CARICOM welcomed the creation of the Strategic Communications Planning Group, which would strengthen links with the media, non-governmental organizations, academia, the business community and young people.

43. CARICOM welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information and other Secretariat units which were currently working together to plan and implement information campaigns and focus attention on newsmaking aspects of the Organization's work. However, it was concerned that the information produced by the Department seemed to be no match for the flood of negative and inaccurate information often produced by the external media. The Department should examine the possibility of entering into more active cooperation arrangements with State and private media companies to produce more documentaries which could be aired on national and international television channels. The Department should capitalize on the uniqueness of the Organization's activities by disseminating information about those activities to a wider audience. Other public information measures too were encouraging, such as the broadening in scope of the daily briefings by the Office of the Spokesman of the Secretary-General.

44. Alongside the three traditional media — the press, radio and television — the United Nations should take full advantage of the Internet, the new "fourth" mass medium. Her delegation was pleased to note the plans for a new media page on the United Nations Web site, the substantial increase in the volume of multimedia postings, the introduction of online chat channels to United Nations experts and an expansion in sales and marketing of United Nations publications and materials. She noted the success of the United Nations Web site, where the number of hits in 1998 had been twice the 1997 figure. The "Cyber School Bus" project, which targeted thousands of schoolchildren in over 60 countries, had become an effective tool for promoting the Organization's activities amongst young people.

45. Radio was perhaps the most cost-effective of the mass media. In that connection, the creation of a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity was a worthwhile notion. The activities of the Caribbean Radio Unit had improved awareness amongst Caribbean people of United Nations activities which impacted on their region. She had no doubt that that Unit should have its opportunities for direct radio broadcasting augmented. At the same time, greater human and financial resources needed to be allocated to the regional centres so that the demand for information about the United Nations could be properly satisfied. CARICOM supported full programming in French and Creole for the people of Haiti and wished to see more United Nations television stations with multi-channel capability, particularly in the developing countries. The Caribbean region in particular could benefit from additional direct linkages between United Nations Television and television stations in the region.

46. The work of the United Nations information centres was extremely important: in 1998, they had helped give high-visibility coverage to a whole range of United Nations

events. However, they must give greater emphasis to issues of concern to the developing countries, such as external debt, poverty eradication and sustainable economic development. The CARICOM member countries again stressed the need for an information officer in the UNDP office in Jamaica, which served the northern Caribbean. The information officer would complement the work of the United Nation Information Centre in Port-of-Spain, which had responsibility for the widely dispersed territories of the Caribbean.

47. **Mr. Chirila** (Romania) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and associated States. The great importance Romania attached to United Nations activities in information field sprang from an awareness of the effectiveness of information as a means of mobilizing Governments and civil society in all countries behind the cause of peace, development and human rights. For the same reason, his delegation shared the view that the United Nations should be projected as an open and transparent organization that was accessible to all, and so the communications function was not just a support function but an integral part of the Organization's programme. His delegation therefore supported the Secretary-General's conceptual framework in respect of communications and information policies and programmes submitted to the Committee on Information at its twentieth session.

48. The Department of Public Information, as the Organization's focal point for information and communications, should be strengthened. His delegation was therefore pleased to see that notion reflected in the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/509) and also in draft resolution B from the Committee on Information, which emphasized that the Department should maintain and improve its activities in areas of special interest to the developing countries and others with special needs, including countries with economies in transition.

49. The Romanian delegation recognized the importance of the United Nations information centres, and considered that there were two points of particular significance. First, it was concerned about the fact that the functional autonomy of the information centres was not always respected and therefore welcomed the consensus at the latest session of the Committee on Information that future integration exercises should be carried out cost-effectively and on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host countries and without adversely affecting the centres' information functions and autonomy. Second, the Romanian Government continued to attach particular importance to the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Bucharest, one of the first information centres established by the United Nations. Unfortunately, over the years financial and material support for the Bucharest Centre from the Department of Public Information had gradually dropped. His delegation again appealed to the Department to consider adequate solutions to redress the situation, and expressed its belief that in satisfying requests from various Governments to open new centres, existing centres should not be neglected.

50. **Mr. Yousefi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Information was a dynamic force for cross-cultural understanding, education and broader participation by people in making the decisions that affected their lives. Some developed countries, thanks to their technological advancement, enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the distribution of information that left the developing countries on the sidelines. Information should not undermine cultural and moral values, distort facts or demonstrate bias towards other countries. An illustration of that argument was the violation of a country's sovereignty by radio and television transmissions directed specifically against that country for political and subversive ends. In that connection, the need to ensure impartiality and balance, improve the information and communications infrastructure of the developing countries by transferring advanced information technology to them and expanding their access to information was more imperative than ever, and to do so a new world information and communications order would have to be established and implemented.

51. The efforts by the Department of Public Information to reflect linguistic diversity in the information it produced were commendable. In that regard, the Department should diversify its programmes to include the languages of the great cultures and civilizations, including Farsi, which was spoken in a number of countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran. By the same token, linguistic diversity should be applied to broadcasts by United Nations Radio, in order to reach a worldwide audience and serve the interests of all regions. An equally important aspect of the pilot international broadcasting project for United Nations Radio should be partnership with national radio broadcasting networks. It was to be hoped that the Department would provide additional information on the project for consideration at the forthcoming session of the Committee on Information. One of the main objectives of reorienting the Organization's information activities was to expand its capacity to communicate at the country level, and that gave the United Nations information centres an important role to play. He emphasized that in the process of restructuring the

information centres and establishing new regional hubs, the views of Member States must be given due consideration. Relations between the information centres and their host countries might include contacts and cooperation with civil society organizations such as media agencies and educational and research institutions.

52. He applauded the use of new technologies, in particular the Internet, to disseminate information on the global scale. However, the Department should continue disseminating information through the traditional media and should provide hard copy to meet the needs of countries with less advanced technology.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.